

The Broken Coin

A Story of Mystery and Adventure By EMERSON HOUGH
From the Scenario by Grace Cunard

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Novelized From the Motion Picture Drama of the Same Name. Produced by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company.

SYNOPSIS.

Kitty Gray, newspaper woman, finds in a curio shop half of a broken coin, the mutilated inscription on which arouses her curiosity and leads her, at the order of her managing editor, to go to the principality of Grahoffen to piece out the story suggested by the inscription. She is followed, and on arrival in Grahoffen her adventures while chasing the secret of the broken coin begin.

SIXTEENTH INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER LVII.

A Tartar Taken.

"Enfin, mademoiselle!" exclaimed Sachio, with the smile which Kitty Gray so well learned how to hate as well as dread. "At last! You are difficult, but as the maxim makers have it, perseverance at length wins its own reward."

"Well, then," she began, facing him, at bay, her hands clenched, her eyes flashing. "What is it that you wish?"

"Ah, well, many things, my dear," said Sachio, coolly. "But especially I desire all the knowledge you have of the affairs of this distracted kingdom here. There is more than one secret here—yes? It has a broken coin and a broken parchment as well—yes? Together they may mean something, each for the other—yes? And we—all of us who are sworn to advance the interest of our kingdom—we need them both—all. Is it not true?"

He felt in his pocket for his silver cigarette case, and would have served himself. As he opened the case the girl made a sudden spring. His hand dropped the little case and caught her by the arm.

"Tut, tut, now!" he said. "Do not be foolish. I may as well say it—you are going once more with us to our own town, the city of Grahoffen."

She could only stamp her foot, too much enraged to speak. But he went on.

"I am thinking you will not so soon make your escape the next time. We have seen that Grahoffen here has deep dungeons—yes? Grahoffen has others quite as deep."

"Take her, men!" he said, "and quick. We must march."

"Ah, well," said Kitty Gray, "it should not prove so difficult. I am unarmed and a woman—I am helpless and innocent of any wrong against you."

"Mademoiselle," said Sachio, "it is idle to waste words. Give over to me the piece of parchment which I know you have."

"I will not," said she calmly. "Search her, men!" said Sachio. "Take away from her what she has—be careful not to tear it more."

She was helpless and realized it. Slowly she drew from her bosom the folded piece of parchment which she had concealed.

"Well, then," said she, "since you resort to such measures, here it is—I do not deny it. I found it. So did you. At least it is as much mine as yours—and more mine, because I did not lose what once I found. But as to what it means, I know nothing. I never saw it before."

"Very well, then," said Sachio. "We will see if we can read its additional riddle at some later time. Now we must go."

In the confusion of the hour, therefore, Kitty Gray vanished and none noted the fashion of her disappearance, for all had matters enough to occupy them fully. Count Frederik alone of all those with whom she lately had spoken missed her, and began search for her. He got no word in any portion of the palace which had been frequented by her as guest or prisoner.

Troubled deeply, Count Frederik once more turned to his own home. Here he made urgent inquiries among his people in the vague hope that once more the young woman whom he sought had for reasons of her own found her way back to a place where she had more than once ventured in the past. But not one of his servants could furnish any knowledge whatsoever. They had not seen her, knew nothing of her presence.

Count Frederik called to him one of his most trusted men.

"Listen," said he. "You know the young American—the one of a certain prominence in the court—the one who has been here as my guest?"

"Yes, excellency," replied the man impatiently.

"Very well. She has disappeared. It is my wish that you discover her for me as soon as possible—at once."

Having taken these measures, possibly sufficient, yet the only ones of offering to his mind, Count Frederik himself hurried once more to the royal palace.

It was, as so often is the case, a small thing which changed the course of greater resolutions. As he crossed the palace grounds so lately the scene of armed combat, he noted the trampled sward, the torn bed of flowers, the broken shrubs, the shorn trees—all the marks of rifle and artillery fire.

Here there lay the debris of the attack and the retreat—arms, equipment. The keen eye of Frederik noted them all. It noted also the glitter of a bit of metal which seemed not a portion of discarded accoutrements. He stopped and picked it up. It was a silver cigarette case, evidently of value and evidently abandoned by some of the Grahoffen forces who so recently had left the place. Count Frederik examined it curiously, opened it.

Within the lid there was written a little inscription which gave him a start. "To Count Sachio, our well beloved, for deeds of valor. From his king."

"So," exclaimed Frederik, "so then—so then! He was here but now. And look—Not far away he saw the prints of sharp-heeled boots in the broken soil. He caught up a little bit of filmy lace—a kerchief whose perfume was familiar to him. He saw against the bark of a nearby tree a fragment of like lace, torn perhaps in some struggle."

"Yes, she was here."

Agitated, he hastened once more now to the palace door. He demanded of all whom he met where last they had seen the young American, but they could give no intelligent replies.

"Let me tell you, then," said Count Frederik in a flash of anger, "since you cannot learn for me. She has gone to Grahoffen—as a prisoner. Go there then, follow Sachio, as I have already ordered. The young American without question has been taken prisoner. We must rescue her. We must do that for every reason in the world—for her own safety and our own."

"And for my own peace of mind," he added sotto voce, as, haggard, he turned away to find such relief as he could in the countless duties which now were to devolve upon him amid the wreck of a government and the ruin of a city.

Although the forces of the king of Grahoffen had been worsted in strategy and had given their parole in order to save their lives in the flooded chambers of the dungeon levels, the kingdom itself, its ruler and its leading men seemed to feel little of the terror common with those actually defeated. Upon the contrary, old Cortislaw and his nobles were victims not so much of terror as chagrin. Neither were they disposed to scrupulously observe their own pledged word, which had purchased life and liberty. Passing from the limits of the beleaguered capital, they did not seem to take such loot as lay at hand, or to carry with them such prisoners as pleased them. Among these latter it chanced that they had one more prisoner whose freedom might much have altered the course of events in this complex little drama.

Had Roleau, the doughty servant of Kitty Gray, been on hand at the time of the capitulation of the Grahoffen forces, no doubt he would have kept so close to his mistress as to guard against any such sudden surprise as had now left her at the mercy of her enemies. But Roleau, prisoner to Grahoffen, had no knowledge of any of the late stirring events, nor any knowledge of the whereabouts of his mistress.

The windows of the cell in which Roleau had been confined faced upon the corridor sometimes used by the retainers of the palace, less frequently by those persons of greater importance. Roleau heard footsteps now, voices, the confusion of a large party arriving. He stepped close to the bars of his cell, pressed his face out, so that he might see. Upon his features any who had observed must have seen joy, exultation. For though himself a prisoner, Roleau had seen now, down below there, the form of that mistress whom he served!

But Roleau was wise. He did not cry out. He did not shout in sudden greeting, as she passed among his captors. Only he stood close and hoped that she would look up.

She did look up, and saw him standing there, and guessed his reason for silence—saw his sudden finger on lip demanding silence from herself as well. A flash of intelligence passed once more between the two.

"Well, well, my pretty one," taunted Sachio. "Welcome once more to our portals, and may you bide with us longer this time than last."

"We shall see," was her retort.

Sachio did not answer, but grimly led her on into the presence of King Cortislaw himself. Cortislaw was still furious in his chagrin at the defeat of his plans.

"So, again, mademoiselle!" said he, and his gray beard curled in his evil smile. "We have you once more. Be lieve us, it is the last time. You shall not escape again. Why is she here, Sachio?" he demanded—"How did you take her?"

"I found her as an angel disdaining the earth, your majesty," laughed Sachio, "spurning the ground—in short safe, as she supposed, high in the branches of a tree! We pulled her out of that, and found in her possession something I had lost—this parchment, your majesty."

Cortislaw examined it curiously. "What, another half-told tale?" said he—"its torn across?"

"Yes," assented Sachio, "it is a mystery like that of the broken coin. If my Latin serves me, it says something of a lost prince."

"You are very faithful, Sachio," said Cortislaw. "You are very faithful, and very efficient. What do you say, mademoiselle?"

"I say nothing," rejoined Kitty Gray, and stood defiant.

Count Sachio spoke for her. "I am persuaded from the way she comport herself, your majesty, that she knows more than she pretends about this inscription here."

"So, then, you undertake to be obstructive?" The eye of Cortislaw was fixed on her with its cold menace.

"I am not obstructive, but I stand upon my rights," she went on. "I have not both the halves of the coin, and if I had I would not give you either. As to this inscription, I know nothing of it—this is the first time I have seen it."

"Take her away, men," said Sachio. "Keep her under guard. We will call you when we need you."

The door of the great reception hall closed now upon Kitty Gray, prisoner once again in Grahoffen towers.

"Well, what think you, Sachio?" said Cortislaw, turning at length to his officer. "She speaks with boldness."

"Yes, and always has," assented Sachio, musingly. "What is the secret of her courage? She seems to have no fear whatever for us."

"Listen, Sachio," said he. "We have made acquaintance with that young woman before, and have got no profit from the meeting. She is too mysterious, and she makes us too much trouble. Were there certain to be a reward for that, very well, but what reward may we hope? We dare not torture the truth from her, as once the king of this country would have done. Since she will not talk, and since we cannot

had proved successful. An instant and Roleau was past them, beyond the door, and in the hall before their scattered senses had time to realize what had happened.

As he fled, Roleau had no plan beyond that of mere flight. But it chanced that he reached the outer corridor just as Kitty's guards were bringing her into it. He fell likewise upon Kitty's guards with such desperate valor that before long they, too, were scattered and helpless. A moment later Kitty and Roleau fled, seeking some exit from the palace walls.

The hue and cry followed them now. Almost they had escaped, but not quite. Even at the great door of the palace itself they were apprehended by yet other armed men. Once more they were brought before the king.

"So it seems we have two inescapable," commented that monarch coolly as he faced Roleau and Kitty, still panting. "This man, as you know, Sachio, is far more dangerous than his accomplice here. She is dangerous, yes, in a way, but this man has hesitated at nothing—not even murder. What shall we do with him?"

Sachio stood also regarding the two. "I'll tell you, your majesty," said he at length, slowly, "if you ask me my own feeling in the matter. Let us send them out of the country together. They have a way of gravitating together—let them go together to that America of which they talk so much. Let them find the protection of that Uncle Sam of whom they prate."

"Away with them!" command Cortislaw, imperiously.

Sachio therefore now had his task. But how to achieve it was his question. He knew well enough he could not oblige either Kitty or Roleau to book passage across the ocean unless they so desired.

"Attend to these two, Lieutenant," said he to the officer of the guard. "Keep them safe until I return."

He hastened now as rapidly as he might to the water front, where at the somewhat restricted docks of Grahoffen an occasional ocean liner touched.

Alone in his palace, Count Frederik paced up and down, engrossed in futile plans. After many hours, an attendant announced the arrival of one of the emissaries he had sent to follow Count Sachio.

"Excellency," began his servant agitatedly—"quick, or we shall be too late."

"What now—why too late—what has happened? Tell me, men!" Count Frederik was none too gentle in his words of anger.

"They have taken her prisoner—they plot to ship her away today—tonight—now, for all I know!"

"What are you saying, man? But you found her, then?"

"Found where she is, or was. As you suspected, she was taken prisoner by Count Sachio and carried to Grahoffen. I followed him. He went to the docks and bargained there with some fellows of an ocean steamer due to sail within an hour or so. I heard them agree to take over a prisoner, a woman—another prisoner, a man. Count Sachio said he would deliver them just before the vessel sailed. They were to be held in the hold and discovered later as stowaways too late for return."

"Quick, men!" He turned now to his assistants. "Hasten to the shipping offices on our own dock. Have them make ready a boat to carry my message to the captain of the royal yacht. Tell him to make ready to sail at once on my arrival—and to expect a race with an ocean liner."

A few moments later he was at the dock and, hurrying into the small boat which lay awaiting, was carried swiftly to the side of the royal yacht, on whose decks already there was evidence of the orderly confusion of a boat about to get under way. Evidently his message to the captain of the yacht had been received.

"Come on board, sir!" said Count Frederik, as the captain met him at the ladder. "You understand?"

"Your servant, Count Frederik," said the commander. "I know you well. Command us."

"Under way at once, then, captain," said Count Frederik. "Lay a course to the foot of the bay. The vessel we must search has perhaps even now sailed from Grahoffen port. It is our duty in the name of the king to intercept her. They have on board prisoners of our own people—there has been treachery done by Sachio, leader of Grahoffen."

An instant, and the jangle of the engine-room bells made sweet music to Count Frederik's ears. At least now there would be action, at least suspense would be at an end.

The speedy yacht ripped through the water as though conscious itself of its imperative duty. Ere long they had passed the lower headlands of the Grahoffen harbor. Eagerly Frederik scanned the levels of the sea as they opened before him. At last an exclamation escaped his lips. A long and heavy cloud of smoke lay on the horizon, the trail of a great ship making for open sea.

"Captain, there she goes! A thousand napoleons if you lay us alongside—dishonor if you fail to do so."

And the captain nodded.

Meantime what was the secret that the distant liner was carrying with her? None save those aboard could tell that, and of these but two or three rude deck men. The thought agents of Sachio had done their work well. None on the ship save those interested had noticed when two bundles, trussed up and concealed in heavy coverings, had been hoisted aboard by the ship's donkey engine and dropped into the hold. Yet in this way two human beings were loaded as cattle, without the knowledge of the ship's officers.

When Kitty Gray recovered her senses she found herself in a dark and noisome hole, she knew not where. Terror smote her. Her pulses refused to work, her mind rebelled.

Above she heard trampings, shoutings, the creaking of tackle, the sound of machinery muffled by intervening walls of the ship's structure. At last she thought she heard the swash of water alongside. What did this mean—was this the sea? Was she a prisoner to be handled in some new and mystifying way? What did it all mean?

His heartless hesitated for a moment, but at length agreed with him. "Why then," said the spokesman. "I suppose—and once more they looked at the gold pieces in their hands. "There is not the least danger in the world about it," said the strange man who had thus accosted them. "You are committing no crime, but are doing this country a service. These two spies will be brought here to the dock just before the ship sails. There is some confusion—but they get aboard—they are hoisted from the dock into the hold, where they will be safe. Very good, the vessel sails. She is at sea one day, two days. Then all at once there is hue and cry—stowaways discovered—two of them. Very well, that is all. They tell their story, but the captain of the ship thinks them to be stowaways, and nothing else. They have the look of such. As such they will be landed in due time—at New York. Their passage money is paid not to the ship but to you yourselves—more than you would make for six months' wages. And besides that, you have done a good service to our country, which is far more friendly to your own, my hearties, than that America to which these spies must be deported. What say you, then? It is a bargain?"

It seemed that it was to be a bargain.

CHAPTER LXX.

A Broken Voyage.

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A faint light came from high above, where the hatchway yet remained open. She saw it all now—she was in a ship's hold, and beyond all aid. She called out, but got no answer. Exhausted by her fruitless efforts, at last she flung herself down upon a nearby bundle—and stared up again with a shriek of terror!

The bundle beneath her had stirred—moved—yes, she was sure of that! It moved again. Terrified as she was, she stooped and cut the thong which bound the neck of the long bag of jute.

There appeared to her gaze the tumbled head and livid face of her friend Roleau! Without her knowledge he had been hoisted in with her and left to live or die, as he chose, bound tight in a bag which gave him little enough chance for air.

Kitty gave a cry of delight and dismay mingled as she bent above her friend. He was half unconscious, unable to speak, because tightly gagged. She aided him and freed him as she might. The air, bad as it was, presently began to revive the sufferer.

"Excellency," said he at last, "excellency, it is you! And where are we?"

"I do not know, Roleau," said she. "I can only guess. We are somewhere in the hold of some ship. We must have been smuggled here, for what purpose I do not know. It may be we shall be carried out to sea. How then can we escape?"

The boat now was far from the dock in the lower bay of Grahoffen harbor. Under full way, she was headed for the open sea. The executive officer came to the captain in his office, and the latter turned upon him an inquiring eye.

"Steam yacht on our starboard quarters, sir," said the latter, "going fast, flying signals for us to slow down so he may come aboard."

"Come aboard—when we are under way and two hours back of our sailing hour? A pest take these little states which are fighting this cat and dog war! We have nothing to do with that—and I warrant it yonder stranger has."

"What orders, sir?"

"Straight ahead, and full speed."

"Very good, sir."

"What is the hour, Judson?" demanded the captain as the executive turned away.

"Four bells, sir."